

One Bad Choice Changed My Life

By a retired chief warrant officer

For 30 years, I was proud to serve my Navy and my country. Then, one night not very long ago, after a normal day at my command, I was in good spirits. I just had been selected for CWO5 and would continue in a job I really enjoyed for a few more years.

I decided to drop by a local club, which was close to the base and where I would find retired and active-duty shipmates having a good time discussing life's events. Of course, there were alcoholic beverages to order, as well as food items.

After a few hours of conversation, enjoyable food, and some beverages, I decided to drive my truck the 15 miles home. I felt at ease and no different than I had when I walked into the club. I drove the familiar road as I had done countless times before, but this time was destined to be different.

About one mile from home, I was traveling 35 mph—the posted speed limit. It had been roughly 18 hours since I had gotten out of bed that Friday morning. I failed to notice a familiar stop sign. I slammed on the brakes and then lost control of my vehicle. It caught the gravel on the shoulder of the roadway, causing me to go off the road and into a security fence.

Everything happened so fast before coming to a deafening halt. I immediately was aware of who I was, where I was, and very happy to know that, as required by all those safety messages, I had buckled up. This “good judgment” decision undoubtedly had saved me from serious injury. I also was immediately relieved to know my mishap had been a single-vehicle crash, with no impact on others.

Upon exiting my truck, I quickly became aware of the severe damage to the vehicle and understood it doesn't take a lot of speed to send a vehicle to the junkyard. The military police soon arrived and questioned me about the events leading to my crash. I then had to go to the station for a breathalyzer test and was charged with driving while intoxicated. I also

had to call my commanding officer—one of the most difficult calls of my career. And, of course, he was disappointed I had placed myself in this position.

Months of hearings then passed, including trips to the legal office and sizable fees before the case was settled. That settlement ended my career on a very sour note, but as one of my shipmates observed, “You have an opportunity to reach out and touch others who may find themselves in a similar situation. Perhaps you'll save their life or career by causing them to consider the real cost of your one bad choice.”

In my case, the financial costs were significant, but the personal and career costs were much greater.

So, my reason for sharing this most personal and embarrassing event with you is in hopes it will impress on you the fact that bad things can happen to good people... successful people... career-oriented people. In many of these life-changing events, utilizing risk management and simply making the right choice can make a difference.

I wish all of you fair winds and following seas as you continue your Navy careers. **S**

A slightly different version of this story appeared in an earlier issue of Hawaii Navy News.

Resources:

- Penalties for Driving Drunk, <http://alcoholism.about.com/cs/drive/a/aa082797.htm>
- The Cost of Drunk Driving, <http://www.ncpa.org/pd/social/pd082201f.html>
- Stop Drinking and Driving, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/toolbox/stopdrinking.htm>
- Impaired Driving, <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/driving.htm>
- 2006 Traffic Safety Annual Assessment—Alcohol-Related Fatalities, www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/nhtsa_static_file_downloader.jsp?file=/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/NCSA/Content/RNotes/2007/810821.pdf